

December 2006

To a Young Man in Monroe County Jail

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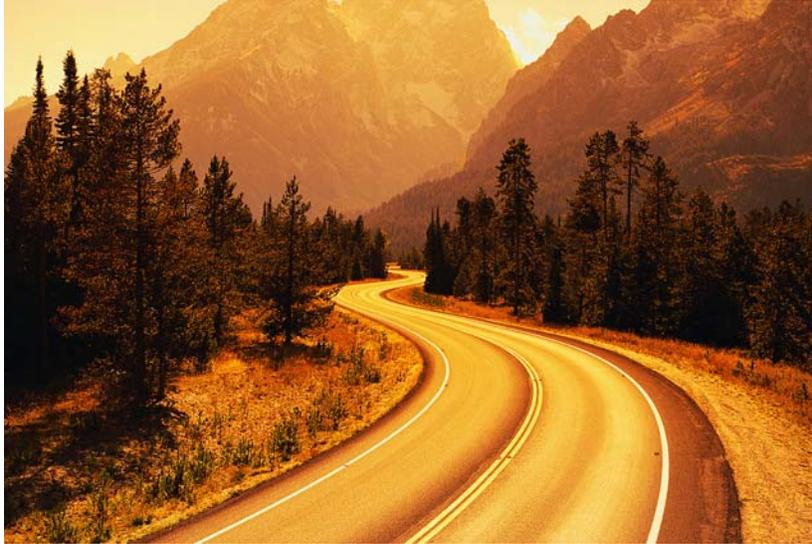
Nolasco, Laura D. (2006) "To a Young Man in Monroe County Jail," *Verbum*: Vol. 4 : Iss. 1 , Article 5.
Available at: <https://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/verbum/vol4/iss1/5>

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To a Young Man in Monroe County Jail

Poetry Bend

Poems reviewed by: REST Club Officers



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To a Young Man in Monroe County Jail

In your cell you are less a criminal
Than the man who tried to have
two wives.
Was there a shortage of men
in New York State
So that two women had to share him?

He was no prize by any means.
And thanks to him
I once again walk among the damned.

If yesterday I bought out
the Spanish section of Wal-Mart
it's thanks to him
who remembered to forget
that the veil does not make the woman
any more than the habit
makes the monk.

Inmates like you
Used to shed enough tears
To leave behind pillars of salt
When I lifted my song
only to God's glory.
So since when
Is the sound of a woman's voice
enough to incite sin and chaos?

Unless they mean
That Billie Holiday song
that had men jumping out of windows
and off bridges
when there were still such things
as 78 records.

I know I know I know
ay no ay no ay no
silence has never become me.
I touch more souls
as I walk among the damned
than I ever hoped to
on the straight and narrow path.

In your cell
you are freer than I ever was.
I swore I'd never go near a stove again
but now I cut up
onions, green and red bell peppers,
carrots and celery
and make sure they sit in
just a hint of tomato sauce.

The secret of a *pollo guisado*
is that it isn't a *sancocho*-
it isn't a stew at all.
You have to heat the olive oil
just enough
to sauté the chicken golden brown.
Then you never add all the ingredients
all at once.
The carrots go in first
because they take longer to cook.
You should remember the basil,
oregano and garlic
and that Puerto Ricans and not Dominicans
use the reddish spice *sazón*
as a finishing touch.

Never ever be in a hurry
when you're making *pollo guisado*.
As I lower the heat to a simmer
I wish I could bring you a helping,
y arroz amarillo on the side
but the only thing they allow in
are soft-covered books
wrapped in cellophane
unless they're religious books.

So until we meet again,
leaf through your holy book
and tell me where it says
that the veil makes the woman
and that silence becomes her.
And after you teach the other inmates
how to pray five times a day,
tell them about the one
who now walks among the damned.

Tell them about the fallen angel
who disobeyed her husband's
supreme command
and is going to hell
for speaking Spanish instead of Arabic
and harboring a criminal
who will never ever commit the insanity
of wanting to share her.

Whatever happened to
"We have made you tribes and nations
so that you may know each other?"¹
If the entire world was supposed to
mirror the Middle East
it would have been so
long before the cultural Gestapo
in my home
tried to make it so.

Let him stew in his anger.
Offer up a supplication for him
and other lost souls
as he issues a *fatwa* for my death by stoning.

Whatever happened to
"Let those who are without sin
cast the first stone?"²

*Ay Dios mío
ruega por el ángel caído.*³

By Laura D. Nolasco

¹ Holy Qur'an 49:13

² John 8:7b

³ Oh my God, pray for the fallen angel.